
Maltitol is a sugar alcohol that is generally used as an artificial sweetener. It is used in food products like sugar-free chocolates, energy bars, bakery items, and chewing gums. Maltitol has fewer calories and a lower GI than table sugar but just like sugar, it does not add any nutritive value to your food product. This sugar alcohol may cause gut issues in some individuals.

Is Maltitol Natural or Artificial?

The simplest answer to this question is that maltitol is completely artificial. It is not a natural sugar substitute or a natural sweetener. It is true that maltitol is a type of carbohydrate or sugar alcohol (polyol) that does occur naturally in many fruits and vegetables. However, it is manufactured artificially from starches like corn, potatoes, and wheat that are rich in sugar maltose. This is done because maltitol is used as a low-calorie sweetener in processed foods and drinks. Using maltitol in bakery items and processed foods can prevent browning and add moisture. Its most widespread use is seen in chewing gums, candies, gelatin capsules, or gummies.

Maltitol vs Sugar: Similarities and Differences

Sugar or refined sugar or table sugar is crystalline sucrose. Sucrose is a type of simple carbohydrate which is naturally found in fruits, and honey, but is the most concentrated in sugarcane. When sugarcane undergoes refining, sucrose is completely extracted from it to produce crystalline sugar. So, the sugar we all use at home to bake or sweeten coffee or tea is nothing but sucrose.

On the other hand, maltitol is a sugar alcohol. Although it has nothing to do with alcohol, it derives its name because of its chemical structure. Of all the sugar alcohols, maltitol's properties are the most like sucrose. Maltitol is generally considered a sugar substitute. It is used in food items such as baked goods, chewing gum, sugar-free chocolates, candies, and ice cream to give sweetness. Although it is considered a safe sugar alternative, it is still not healthy. It is thought to cause many gastrointestinal issues like gas, bloating, and diarrhea.

Both sugar and maltitol have more or less the same calorie count. They both affect your blood glucose levels. And most importantly, both of them are

processed and artificial.

Considering the above, quitting sugar is a great idea but choosing maltitol as a sugar alternative is not going to be healthy. It is better to choose sugar substitutes that are natural, safe, and healthy, you can choose natural sweeteners made from stevia, monk fruit, or erythritol.

Is Maltitol a Healthy Sugar Substitute?

Maltitol is a low-calorie artificial sweetener. It falls under the category of sugar alcohols, and sugar alcohols are not alcohol. The essential properties of a sweetener are its low glycemic index, minimum calories, and low carbs. However, maltitol has a decent glycemic index of 35 which is less than sugar but it will still affect your blood sugar levels.

The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) lists maltitol as a GRAS (Generally Recognized as Safe) substance. So, it is safe for most people.

Maltitol may not cause any long-term negative health impacts, but it can cause bloating, gas or diarrhea.

These gut problems happen because maltitol is not completely absorbed during digestion. Instead, when it reaches the large intestine, it becomes fermented by bacteria, which can potentially cause gastric symptoms. The FDA requires products containing over 50 grams of maltitol to carry a warning about potential laxative effects.

However, it is an artificial sweetener and there are several natural sweeteners available these days that are far better and completely safe when compared to maltitol. These natural sweeteners are more like zero-calorie sugar with zero GI, zero calories, and zero carb content.

Maltitol/Stevia-Based Sugar-free Food Items v/s Food Items With Sugar: What's Healthier?

Quitting sugar is a great decision to make for a healthier lifestyle or to become a healthy person. It helps you cut down the unnecessary empty calories, control your weight, help improve skin health and even prevent aging. All this together keeps you away from lifestyle disorders like obesity, diabetes, thyroid, etc.

However, it is not necessary to go “sweet-less,” you can still choose to add natural sugar substitutes to your diet and lifestyle. One of the most popular and

effective natural sugar substitutes is stevia -so answering the question, you can choose to include a stevia-based sweetener for a healthier lifestyle. But using maltitol is not healthy, because it is an artificial sugar substitute. On the one hand, where stevia comes with zero calories, zero carbs, and a zero glycemic index; maltitol offers almost the same calories as sugar and even affects your blood sugar levels because of its GI.

Therefore, there is absolutely no harm in choosing a sugar replacement, provided it is natural (made of stevia, monk fruit, or erythritol), offers no empty calories, and keeps you away from the harmful effects of sugar yet keeping the sweetness.

So, What are the Alternatives for Maltitol?

There are many substitutes for Maltitol, both in the artificial sweetener and natural sweetener market. However, if you're looking for the healthiest Maltitol alternatives, then natural sweeteners are the best option.

Natural sweeteners also belong to two categories.

- The first category constitutes honey, jaggery, dates, etc. These are naturally occurring sweeteners with high GI value and sugar-like impact on the body.
- The second category features zero-calorie, zero-carb, and zero glycemic index sweeteners including those made of stevia and monk fruit. These natural sweeteners are slowly digested and absorbed by the body so that you do not experience sudden blood sugar spikes and hence are great for diabetics and weight watchers.

Bottomline:

If you're trying to reduce your sugar intake and have a weight loss or sugar control goal in mind, then Maltitol and other artificial sweeteners can be a common choice. However, you have to be mindful of the fact that when used beyond recommended dosage, Maltitol can actually lead to a blood sugar spike, diarrhea, and other gut-related concerns.

In such a case, opting for a zero-calorie, zero-carb, and zero GI natural sweetener is the best choice. While satisfying sweet cravings, it also ensures you do not experience any nasty side effects.